



University of Toronto-York University  
Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies

Canada and Hong Kong Project

Research Papers: No. 2

# Hong Kong Visa Students in Secondary Schools in Metropolitan Toronto

by  
Paul L.M. Lee

Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies  
Toronto, 1994



University of Toronto-York University  
Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies

**Canada and Hong Kong Project**

**Research Papers: No. 2**

---

Hong Kong Visa Students in  
Secondary Schools in  
Metropolitan Toronto

---

by  
Paul L.M. Lee

Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies  
Toronto, 1994

**Canada and Hong Kong Research Project**

University of Toronto - York University

Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies

York Lanes, Suite 270

York University

4700 Keele Street

North York, Ontario

CANADA M3J 1P3

Copyright © 1994 by the Governing Council of the  
University of Toronto and the Board of Governors of York University.

All rights reserved.

ISBN 1-895296-16-1

Printed in Canada at the Coach House Printing Company.

Co-Directors, Canada and Hong Kong Project:

Diana Lary and Bernard Luk

Coordinator and Editor: Janet A. Rubinoff

## Canada and Hong Kong Research Papers


The Canada and Hong Kong Research Papers focus on special topics of immediate interest. Some of these papers deal with discrete subjects which are best suited as separate works, while others address concerns which need immediate publication because of the timeliness of the issues. The Research Papers are intended to complement our Canada and Hong Kong Papers volumes, which are collections of papers presented at our research workshops.

Diana Lary and Bernard Luk  
Co-Directors

Janet A. Rubinoff  
Coordinator and Editor

### About the Author

**Paul L.M. Lee** received his B.Sc. from the University of Hong Kong and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in education measurement and statistics. Dr. Lee has served as a school teacher and education administrator in Hong Kong for more than twenty years. He has recently immigrated to Canada and is now teaching mathematics and science in a secondary school in Ontario. He also serves as a research associate of the Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies at the University of Toronto – York University.



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2010 with funding from  
Multicultural Canada; University of Toronto Libraries

## Table of Contents

Introduction	JANET A. RUBINOFF	7
Study of Hong Kong Visa Students	PAUL L.M. LEE	17
Background		17
Objectives of Study		19
Research Methods		19
Students from Hong Kong Studying in Ontario		20
Hong Kong Students Studying in Metro Toronto		22
Responses from Student Questionnaires		23
Interviews with School Teachers, Principals, and Related Personnel		30
Reponses from Public School Teachers		30
Responses from Private School Teachers		32
Provision of Support to Visa Students		33
Proposed Improvement in Solving Problems		34
Conclusion		35
References		36
Acknowledgements		36
Appendix 1: Questionnaire for Secondary School Students		39
Appendix 2: Interview with School Personnel		46





## Introduction

For a number of years, the largest group of international students in Canada has been from Hong Kong. Fifteen to twenty years ago, one of the main reasons that Hong Kong students came to study at Canada's universities and colleges was the shortage of places at post-secondary institutions in Hong Kong. For the past ten years, to a large extent, this great influx of Hong Kong students to Canada is due to the uncertain political situation in Hong Kong after 1997, when the territory will come under the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China. Many people from Hong Kong are immigrating to Canada and, in preparation for migration, are sending their children abroad for secondary as well as university education.

Because of the significant increase in students from Hong Kong and the number of concerns which had arisen in the schools, the Canada and Hong Kong Project decided in 1991 to fund the research for new studies of visa students in Ontario secondary and post-secondary institutions. "Visa student" is here defined as someone who has no permanent residence status in Canada and has a student visa only for the purpose of attending school. Dr. Paul L.M. Lee, an education researcher and recent immigrant from Hong Kong, and Dr. Kathryn Mickle of York University agreed to carry out these studies and convene a Project-sponsored workshop to present and discuss their results.

On 3 October 1992, the Canada and Hong Kong Project sponsored the workshop on "Hong Kong Visa Students in Canada" at York University. The workshop was held in conjunction with the Festival Hong Kong '92 in Canada. Divided into a morning session focusing on secondary schools and the afternoon on universities and colleges, this workshop was attended by approximately 50 specialists in the area of education and international students. These included teachers, school board members, psychologists, social workers, guidance counsellors, ministry officials, and private school and college administrators. While Paul Lee and Kathryn Mickle gave the main papers, a number of other specialists were invited to give short presentations, which are summarized below. These included Foster Hanson of the Ontario Ministry of Education; Kenneth Harvey of the Vancouver Board of Education;

Clark Hortsing-Perna, international student adviser at York University; Benjamin Kuo, social worker with Chinese Family Life Services; and Gordon McNeil, director of international recruitment at Seneca College. The final discussion was chaired by Prof. Bernard Luk, co-director of the Canada and Hong Kong Project.

The morning session began with a general presentation on "Exporting and Importing" Ontario's educational system by Foster Hanson of the Ontario Ministry of Education, Program Implementation and Review Branch. Mr. Hansen was responsible for promoting Ontario's educational system abroad as well as administering the inspection of out-of-province private school programs in Europe, the Pacific Rim, Caribbean, and Central America. Addressing the implications of the view that "knowledge is a marketable product," he stressed that Ontario had an important role to play in terms of the importing – the education of considerable numbers of visa students in its secondary and post-secondary institutions – and exporting its educational system and teachers abroad.

In terms of economics, he emphasized that the education of foreign students had become a major industry in Ontario, generating over \$580 million in the early 1990s in foreign exchange for the province's economy through tuition fees and student spending. Of the numbers coming to Ontario to study at the secondary level, Hong Kong represents the largest group, followed by (in descending order) the United States, Japan, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom. On the "export" side, there are six schools in Asia, including two in Hong Kong, with accreditation in Ontario secondary school curriculum, and the province has been involved in the overseas placement of Ontario-trained teachers and principals as well as educational programs. Given the importance of the English language to the world of business and commerce, Mr. Hanson claimed that educational programs like Ontario's are in high demand, particularly in Asia. Of future benefit to Ontario and to Canada in general is the potential for developing international trade relationships from the mutual educational experiences of the large numbers of foreign students, such as those from Hong Kong, studying in Canadian international schools or in school systems in Canada.

Dr. Paul Lee was the main speaker in the morning session, and he presented the results of his research on the adjustment and experiences of "Hong Kong Visa Students in Metropolitan Toronto Secondary Schools." His revised paper is published here as the Project's Research Paper No. 2.

As a comparison with Ontario's educational programs for visa students, Kenneth Harvey, director of Career and Community Education Services of the Vancouver Board of Education, described various international programs offered by the Vancouver School Board and the advanced support services for Hong Kong students in that city.

While Vancouver did not use agents to recruit visa students, the Board held "information meetings" once a year in places like Taiwan and Hong Kong. Mr. Harvey explained that spaces in the Vancouver schools were limited so the visa students accepted tended to be above average academically. Vancouver received a total of 50-60% of the foreign students in the region; New Westminster also had over 200 visa students. Of the approximately 300 international students in the Vancouver system in 1992, over 180 were originally from Hong Kong. There were from 8-50 of these students in each of 15 of the total 18 secondary schools. The numbers, though growing, were considerably smaller than in Toronto; however, Vancouver seemed to offer a more comprehensive and innovative program to integrate these students into the Canadian school system.

Mr. Harvey emphasized that the problems of these visa students and the creation of a safe educational environment were of great concern to the Vancouver Board. Many of these children were far away from home without close family and in a vulnerable position. He outlined the requirements and programs of the Board for dealing with international students: 1) the requirement of a responsible local person, not just a guardian, that schools could contact with regard to major problems of individual students; 2) writing to parents in Hong Kong regarding both the successes and problems of their children; 3) the establishment of a contact person in each school who met with foreign students and encouraged their involvement in extra-curricular activities; 4) the organization of orientation programs before school began, follow-up meetings during the year, and the establishment of a "buddy system" matching visa and local Canadian students; and 5) the establishment of "home-stay" programs. There were also student liaison officers from the Vancouver police who talked with visa students on issues like victimization and youth gangs. Finally, the Vancouver Board provided increased staffing in its schools with a ratio of 1:15 for international students. Mr. Harvey stressed that most visa students did very well in the school system, with 50-60% of them making the honour roll each year. In contrast, the average for local residents was only about 10%.

The afternoon session on Hong Kong visa students in post-secondary institutions began with a presentation by Dr. Kathryn Mickle of the results of her research. Her study of visa students at York University was an update of her earlier research in 1984 and 1986. Dr. Mickle concentrated on the factors which aided the adaptation of these students to their experience in Canada, the barriers to their feeling comfortable in Canada, perceived differences in culture, the problems reported by these students, and their recommendations to make their sojourn in this country more meaningful.

According to Statistics Canada ["Hong Kong Student Enrolment by Province, Institution and Registration Status, 1991-92"], there were 8,917 full-time and 2,634 part-time visa students from Hong Kong studying at Canadian universities in 1991-92 – the largest group of international students in Canada. Both York University and the University of Toronto in Ontario had considerably more of these visa students than other Canadian universities. In 1991-92 U. of T. had 1,897 full-time visa students from Hong Kong and 516 part-time students, while York University had 1,375 full-time and 423 part-time students from Hong Kong. The University of British Columbia in Vancouver had the third highest number – 711 full-time and 85 part-time Hong Kong visa students.

One area of concern was that many Chinese visa students experience severe loneliness during their sojourn in Canada (according to one study by the Canadian Bureau for International Education in 1988, over 80%). In addition to their sense of isolation in a new society, there were also factors within Chinese culture and family life – greater self-restraint and formality in interpersonal relationships – which may enhance this loneliness. There was considerable family pressure on these international students to excel academically, leaving them little time for social and extra-curricular activities. This inner anxiety was rarely acknowledged, and often Hong Kong visa students expressed their feelings in terms of physical ailments rather than seeking professional counselling. In addition to difficulties with the English language, there were considerable differences in cultural values, communication styles, role expectations, and world view. Finally, there was the additional problem of racism or discrimination against these students within universities and the community at large.

According to Dr. Mickle and other researchers, factors which lessen the stress of cross-cultural adaptation include interpersonal skills such as open-mindedness, a nonjudgmental perspective, tolerance for ambi-



guity, inner security, environmental mobility and a limited degree of ethnocentrism. Other variables are nationality, status, language proficiency, age, educational level, and previous cross-cultural experience. Of particular importance in the adjustment of visa students is their degree of social interaction with members of the host culture and the supportive function of their co-national group which reinforces psychological security, self-esteem, and a sense of belonging. Thus, successful adaptation of visa students is related to their interaction with Canadian as well as Chinese friends, their participation in social activities with Canadians, their facility with English, a positive perception of Canadians, the length of their stay, less perception of discrimination, and less adherence to traditional values.

At York University, questionnaires were sent to 500 students originally from Hong Kong – 250 visa students and 250 landed immigrants. A total of 126 answered the questionnaire, 77 Hong Kong visa students (31% of those surveyed at York) and 49 immigrant students (20%). More intensive interviews were held with 15 of these students in order to determine a better understanding of their responses.

In these interviews, the students described their experiences in Canadian schools and the significant differences between Chinese and Canadian cultures that sometimes made adaptation difficult for them. With regard to recreational activities, instead of playing or viewing sports like hockey, football and baseball in Canada, people in Hong Kong spent more time shopping, eating out and attending movies. The students also felt the pace of life was much faster in Hong Kong and that Canadian students were generally “less serious.”

The Hong Kong students indicated that Chinese families have more discipline over their children who, consequently, have less freedom than Canadian children. Because of their parents' expectations and the emphasis on family loyalty in Chinese culture, the Hong Kong students felt obliged to do very well at their Canadian university. However, they often experienced more difficulty than they had expected with adapting to a new language, Canadian culture and values, and a more open educational system. They often felt “caught between two systems,” not being able to communicate to their parents the difference between what is expected of them and what they can realistically accomplish. Coping with the pressure of parental expectations caused a great deal of stress to these visa students.

Hong Kong students found that Canadians expressed their feelings more openly than people from Hong Kong and also remarked on the

degree of physical touching between members of the opposite sex in Canadian society. They felt people were more conservative and reserved in Hong Kong and did not openly display their emotions. However, a number of these students perceived that the emotional expression of Canadians was often very superficial, and they did not feel the same deep friendship with Canadian students that existed among the Chinese. Friendship with Chinese people, they explained, was "forever," but for Canadians friendship was often based on some external factor and could quickly end. Thus, social contacts with Canadian students were mainly "instrumental" rather than emotional – communication about courses and assignments or about daily events rather than of deeper personal significance. In general though, the Hong Kong students were more reluctant to discuss personal information with anyone, even fellow Chinese students.

Finally, both Hong Kong visa and immigrant students were particularly concerned with discrimination they had experienced in Canadian society. Many students mentioned discrimination in restaurants and stores from abusive employees and in the university by professors and support staff. Visa students felt the most serious incidents were over rental of housing while immigrant students experienced racism while seeking employment or job promotions. A few indicated their feelings of uncertainty in coming to Canada for higher studies and questioned if they had made the right choice.

Some students remarked on the Canadian stereotype of Hong Kong Chinese as being very rich, from predominantly business families, and eager to stay in Canada. One female student stressed that not all visa students wanted to remain in Canada as life was "not better for us here." In fact, one of the differences in this study from Dr. Mickle's earlier work was the percentage of those visa students indicating that they wished to remain in Canada after graduation. Only 30% of the visa students indicated their desire to stay in Canada in 1992 (51% wanted to return to Hong Kong) as opposed to 38% in her 1986 study. Dr. Mickle attributed this drop to the economic recession in Canada in the early 1990s and the difficulties in finding good employment in their field of study.

A correlation of answers to the questionnaire indicated that many Hong Kong students experienced a high degree of stress. One difficulty was separating the stress associated with their intercultural adaptation from the general stress of all university students. Responses to certain questions on the form indicated that visa students had a slightly higher

stress indicator than the immigrant students, but both groups experienced high levels of anxiety. Some indicated they “worried a lot;” others experienced a sense of isolation and loneliness. More severe reactions were inertia, mild depression, and a general feeling that “life was not worthwhile.” One particular problem for university level international students was that there were less support systems than for those in secondary institutions.

The results of the questionnaire and interviews confirmed the successful adaptation of Hong Kong visa students was linked to such factors as their participation in social activities with Canadians, a positive perception of Canadians, the length of stay in the country and their year level at university, their ease in communicating in English, and their flexibility and less adherence to traditional Chinese values (such as not expressing one’s feelings openly). A key variable in the success of their university experience was the ability to use English effectively, for those who spoke English well were more apt to participate with Canadians and to adapt more successfully. Those who associated almost exclusively with other Hong Kong students were less adaptive and less integrated within Canadian society.

Thus, Dr. Mickle concluded that to help visa students adjust to their university experience, more English as a Second Language (ESL) courses should be offered at universities or colleges and also in the community. These courses should be designed not only to teach language facility but also to introduce international students to Canadian people and help them learn how to interact. The students suggested that ESL courses should help them recognize mistakes in writing and speaking and focus on essay writing. Dr. Mickle felt that programs for international students at universities should stress interaction with host families or peer groups within the Canadian student population. To confront the racism and stereotypes of many Canadians, more accurate information should be provided in the media and schools about people from Hong Kong, their culture, and types of problems they experience in Canada. Dr. Mickle also recommended that university and college orientation programs for visa students should focus on information about Canadian society and culture as well as on the process of adaptation itself.

After Dr. Mickle’s presentation, two commentators, Clark Hortsing-Perna and Benjamin Kuo, addressed their experiences with international students. Clark Hortsing-Perna, International Students Adviser at York University, gave some historical background concerning visa

student attendance at York and his role in counselling Hong Kong students, in particular. He explained that in 1992 there were about 2,100 international students enrolled at York and just under 1,000 were visa students from Hong Kong. This pattern had been stable over the past five years at York.

With the imposition of international differential fees at York after 1984, which considerably raised tuition for non-resident foreign students, the overall numbers of visa students declined until 1987. Since that time there has been a slow but steady increase, although totals have yet to reach pre-1984 levels. Mr. Hortsing-Perna provided the following figures:

Year	Total International Students	Hong Kong Visa Students
1983-84	2,571	1,189
1987-88	1,665	875
1989-90	1,761	881
1991-92	2,183	979

He observed that despite the large number of students from Hong Kong (over half the total international student body), they rarely used the counselling services of the International Students, Student Exchanges and Study Abroad Office. He estimated that he spent less than 10% of his time with Hong Kong visa students. While almost all international students take advantage of the immigration support services provided by his office, few students from Hong Kong benefited from the non-academic counselling available through this York office. However, in 1992 he observed that more Hong Kong students than in the past had taken advantage of the financial support services of the International Students Office, which adjusts deadlines and negotiates payment plans on behalf of international students. He felt that the increase in financial difficulties for students from Hong Kong was in part due to the world-wide recession at that time; however, it might also indicate an increase of middle and lower-middle class students from Hong Kong whose families struggled to meet increased tuition payments.

Addressing the question of why few Hong Kong students used university support services for international students, Mr. Hortsing-Perna felt that, in part, this was due to cultural differences, though he did not elaborate. More importantly, Metropolitan Toronto had a large



Chinese community with many recent immigrants from Hong Kong, and Cantonese students had considerable opportunities within the larger community outside the university for co-national support networks and social interaction. Not only were there a number of Chinese community organizations and services, there were also Chinese enclaves where Hong Kong visa students could shop, bank, practise their religion, socialize, and seek personal or financial advice, all in Cantonese. Thus, Hong Kong students tended to have their own peer group, family, or community support networks and relied less on the university. Another reason for their limited demands on York's counselling services was the existence of a strong and active Chinese Student Association at York which provided social activities and advice to Hong Kong visa students. Finally, Mr. Hortsing-Perna mentioned that there were far more demands from foreign graduate students than undergraduates on his office's services. Since over 98% of the Hong Kong visa students were undergraduates, this was also a factor in their limited use of his office. He questioned the fact that York's international student office did not offer any counselling services in Cantonese or Mandarin, which might be most helpful to Hong Kong visa students experiencing financial or other difficulties.

Benjamin Kuo, a social worker for Chinese Family Life Services, spoke on the "Adaptational and Adjustment Barriers" faced by visa students in Metropolitan Toronto, particularly teenagers from Taiwan. He explained that unlike the Hong Kong visa students, the majority of whom are older, visa students from Taiwan tend to be almost exclusively adolescent males between the ages of 13 and 15. This is largely due to the requirement of compulsory military training in Taiwan for male students after age 16 as well as the shortage of university spaces.

Mr. Kuo emphasized that because of their immaturity and lower proficiency in English than Hong Kong students coming to Canada, these Taiwanese visa students were particularly vulnerable and often experienced a more difficult adjustment process. Many had problems coping with the greater freedom of their lives away from their families as well as adjusting to the more open and independent style of Canadian education. Parents also put considerable pressure on their children for high academic achievement which caused great stress. There was a reluctance to turn to teachers or school authorities for help, and, consequently, many of the adolescents that Mr. Kuo encountered in his job as social worker suffered great anxiety, isolation, and loneliness. Many of these young people had turned to their own peer

group of Mandarin-speaking Taiwanese students, which sometimes reinforced maladjusted coping behaviour, such as skipping classes or staying out late and spending lavishly at arcades or karaoke night clubs. There were some incidents of extortion.

Mr. Kuo felt that teachers and school personnel needed to be made more aware of the adjustment problems of visa students in Canadian society. He recommended that teachers, counsellors, and other concerned individuals at secondary schools and universities develop more programs to encourage strong social, as well as academic, linkages with these students.

Gordon McNeil, director of International Recruitment at Seneca College, closed the afternoon session with a brief talk on recruitment strategies by community colleges of visa students from Hong Kong. Seneca actively recruited many students from Hong Kong who were primarily enrolled in the college's programmes in business, computer studies, and engineering. Bernard Luk, co-director of the Canada and Hong Kong Project, presented the final wrap up and led the discussion, which focused on the problems encountered by Hong Kong visa students and suggestions for improved services and linkages with these students.

Janet A. Rubinoff, Ph.D.  
Coordinator and Editor  
Canada and Hong Kong Project  
November 1994

# A Study of Hong Kong Visa Students in Secondary Schools in Metropolitan Toronto

*Paul L. M. Lee*

## Background

The number of Hong Kong students studying overseas has exceeded 10,000 every year since 1985, reaching a peak of 21,118 in 1990. The four countries most favoured by Hong Kong students for overseas studies are the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. The total number of student visas issued for these four countries, as supplied by the visa-issuing authorities, from 1985 to 1991 are as follows:

**Table 1**  
**Number of Student Visas Issued to Hong Kong Students**  
**by Country (1985 - 1991)**

Year	UK	USA	Canada	Australia	Total
1985	4492	3505	2912	445	11354
1986	4269	3509	2930	688	11396
1987	4232	3679	3616	1877	13404
1988	3856	4215	3808	3147	15206
1989	4539	4855	5096	4678	19168
1990	4349	5840	5681	5258	21128
1991	4428	5866	4541	3590	18422

From the above table, it can be observed that the number of Hong Kong students going abroad for further studies nearly doubled between 1985 and 1990, and Canada has consistently attracted about a quarter of these students.

However, the trend of overseas study has decreased since 1991. One of the possible reasons for this decline could be the increase in emigration from Hong Kong to other countries. Since the mid-1980s, over 20,000 Hong Kong immigrants annually have permanently settled in Canada. Large numbers of Hong Kong residents are also sending their children abroad for their education in preparation for immigration. Many of these young people from Hong Kong, who first came to Canada as visa students, have changed their status during the course

of their studies to landed immigrant, which requires no visa.

In general, a large proportion of students going to the USA is at the tertiary, or university, level, while increasingly large numbers of younger Hong Kong students are attending secondary schools in Canada and Australia. Those in Canada tend to concentrate in Toronto and Vancouver, though increasing numbers are going to Edmonton and Calgary.

While these visa students may have brought with them their culture and thus will enrich the curriculum and school life in their new environment, the acceptance of large numbers of visa students, in addition to the increasing enrolment of immigrant students from Hong Kong, has placed great strain on the available resources of the school boards and individual schools accepting them. These visa students also often experience culture shock, which can be especially difficult for the younger ones, many of whom have left their families at a tender age to live on their own for the first time. How they adjust to their new environment can have a major effect on their personal development, school performance, and perceptions of Canada for their future career.

During the past decade, there have been a few studies on Hong Kong visa students in Canada. The earliest one dealt with those studying in Canadian universities [Mickle, 1984, 1986]. Another study on Chinese students from Hong Kong in Canadian universities was done at the University of Calgary [Chan, 1987]. In 1992, Kathryn Mickle updated her study of university students from Hong Kong at York University. The main focus of these prior studies is on cross-cultural adaptation and the social-cultural orientation of Hong Kong visa students.

At the secondary level, there is a study on the exodus experience – difficulties encountered by international high school students, mainly from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Singapore [Chow, 1990]. These international students were attending different accredited private high schools within the Metropolitan Toronto area during the 1989-90 academic year. Chow examines their reasons for coming to study in Canada, language and various adaptation difficulties, and also personal and family characteristics.

The North York Board of Education, one of the leading boards in Metropolitan Toronto receiving a large number of Hong Kong visa students at the secondary level, carried out a study of the services provided to visa students in North York secondary schools in 1984. Various improvements of the support services for visa students were proposed [see Turner, Macfarlane, & Crawford, 1984].

## Objectives of Study

The objectives of the present study are to document the experiences and expectations of Hong Kong visa students at the secondary level and the efforts being made by schools and school boards to meet the challenge. Possible improvements in overcoming difficulties during this transition period are identified and proposed for consideration. Since the majority of Hong Kong visa students in Canada are studying in Ontario, particularly in Metropolitan Toronto, the study focuses on this geographical area. Specifically, this study examines the following:

1. demographical distribution patterns of Hong Kong visa students studying in secondary schools in Ontario and, especially, in Metropolitan Toronto.
2. the psychological, academic, social, financial, and other problems faced by these visa students.
3. provision of support by individual schools, school boards, community services groups, and other government and voluntary agencies for these visa students.
4. difficulties encountered by teachers, principals, and related personnel in providing education and essential services to this group.
5. identification of possible improvements in solving the problems faced by visa students, teachers, principals, and the personnel of school boards and other agencies.

## Research Methods

The basic information for this study, which was conducted from October 1991 to September 1992, was gathered through questionnaires (278 were completed). The questionnaire designed by Kathryn Mickle [1984] for university students was shortened and modified for use with secondary school students. This revised survey (see appendix 1) contains questions on current or past problems that these students have experienced and the support they were receiving from their families, peer groups, and school authorities. Demographic descriptions of the sample were also collected. The researcher administered the questionnaire in eight Metropolitan Toronto schools (two private and six public) with large enrolments of Hong Kong visa students. In addition to the general study, a sub-sample of the respondents (about 30) were interviewed for a more detailed elaboration of their difficulties and the support they hoped to obtain.

Officials of school boards, principals, teachers, and staff of related agencies and voluntary bodies were also interviewed (total of 28) to



solicit information concerning the support given to and the difficulties encountered by visa students. They were asked to give their suggestions for improvements.

Statistics concerning the number of Hong Kong visa students each year and their geographical distribution in secondary schools in Ontario and in Metropolitan Toronto were provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the school boards in Metro Toronto. Research findings are given in the following sections.

### **Students from Hong Kong Studying in Ontario**

The actual number of Hong Kong visa students studying in Ontario, much less Metro Toronto, is difficult to identify because of the way statistics are collected by the Ontario Ministry of Education. There are differences in the categories used by the public and private schools to define "visa students." The public and separate schools gather statistics on students coming to study in Ontario for a particular year according to their *location of study in the previous year*. Hence, a Hong Kong student who is studying for the second year at these schools will be regarded as coming from Ontario and not from Hong Kong. In the succeeding years, there will be a cumulative effect on these statistics of students originally from Hong Kong and studying in Ontario. Furthermore, there is no distinction between visa students and students with landed immigrant status so it is impossible to separate the two categories and determine the exact number of those with only student visas.

According to statistics collected for the *September Reports* of the Ontario Ministry of Education, the annual enrolment of students from Hong Kong, from 1987-1991, in elementary and secondary public schools and Catholic separate schools was just over 4,000. The distribution is given in Table 2.

In 1988-89 there was a decline in the number of students from Hong Kong enrolled in Ontario schools. Since there was no decline in the total numbers of visas issued to students from Hong Kong in these years (see above, Table 1), the drop in the figures for Ontario schools for 1988-89 can largely be explained by the decline in the total number of immigrant landings in Canada from Hong Kong – from 23,286 in 1988 to 19,994 in 1989. The corresponding numbers of landings in Ontario are 13,523 in 1988 and 10,793 in 1989 [Lary, 1990]. Thus, we can assume there were less immigrant, rather than visa, students from Hong Kong in Ontario schools.

**Table 2**  
**Students from Hong Kong Entering Ontario Schools**  
**(1987-88 to 1990-91)**

Year	Public		Catholic Separate		TOTAL
	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	
1987-88	1847	2224	490	132	4693
1988-89	1582	2201	378	144	4305
1989-90	2238	2963	472	251	5924
1990-91	1378	2525	232	145	4280

As for enrolments in private schools in Ontario, students from outside Ontario are classified according to their *place of permanent residence*, and most of them come from Hong Kong, Quebec, and the People's Republic of China (PRC). There is an increase in enrolment of students from Hong Kong – 1,038 in 1988 to 1,685 in 1990, an increase of 62% within two years. We know that these students from Hong Kong are all visa students as these statistics are collected by province or country of permanent residence.

**Table 3**  
**Ontario Private School Enrolment by Province or Country of**  
**Permanent Residence (1988-91)**

Year	Hong Kong	PRC	Quebec
1988	1038	107	425
1989	1246	106	450
1990	1685	208	508
1991	2438	293	1013

Thus, it is impossible to know the exact number of visa students in the Ontario school system in any given year. For example, the total number of students coming from Hong Kong and studying in Ontario during 1990-91 can only be identified as approximately 6,718. We do not know how many of these were visa, rather than landed immigrant, students or how many returning students in the public schools were actually from Hong Kong but counted as “coming from Ontario” after their first year.

## Hong Kong Students Studying in Metropolitan Toronto and Neighbouring Regions

Students from Hong Kong coming to study in Ontario tend to concentrate in Metropolitan Toronto and its neighbouring regions. [See Lary, 1991, for statistics on total number of Hong Kong immigrants coming to Ontario and settling in the Metro Toronto area – 86% in 1989 and 1990.] For 1989-90, over 4,000 newcomers from Hong Kong enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in Metro Toronto and the Peel and York Regions. Detailed breakdowns by municipalities in Metropolitan Toronto and the neighbouring regions are given in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
**Students from Hong Kong Entering Public Schools in**  
**Metro-Toronto and Neighbouring Regions (1987-88 to 1990-91)**

City/Region	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
<b>Elementary</b>				
Peel Region	116	130	206	206
York Region	177	182	361	361
Metro Toronto	1410	1172	1487	885
East York	30	19	37	21
Etobicoke	12	23	17	6
North York	431	244	351	191
Scarborough	715	677	840	490
Toronto	212	201	238	173
York	10	8	4	3
<b>Secondary</b>				
Peel Region	56	90	175	97
York Region	112	112	233	208
Metro Toronto	1796	1777	2253	2009
East York	25	23	31	17
Etobicoke	26	23	73	56
North York	596	558	572	447
Scarborough	508	511	517	387
Toronto	628	651	1043	1087
York	13	11	17	15



The number of students entering Catholic separate schools is limited because these schools give preference of admission to students of Roman Catholic faith.

**Table 5**  
**Students from Hong Kong Entering Catholic Separate Schools**  
**in Metropolitan Toronto and Neighbouring Regions**  
**(1987-88 to 1990-91)**

School Board	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90	1990-91
<b>Elementary</b>				
Metro Toronto	315	214	262	108
Dufferin/Peel	53	46	62	21
York Region	83	83	106	68
<b>Secondary</b>				
Metro Toronto	21	22	50	43
Dufferin/Peel	11	4	29	18
York Region	42	48	75	35

### Responses From Student Questionnaires

A total of 278 Hong Kong visa students from two private schools and six public schools in the Metropolitan Toronto area completed the secondary student questionnaires. Of these students, 56.8% were male and 43.2% were female. Their average age was 19. The majority of students were attending Grade 12 (26.3%) and Grade 13 (52.5%). Those studying in lower grades included: Grade 9 (2.2%), Grade 10 (5%), and Grade 11 (13.7%). Their average length of stay in Canada before completing the questionnaire was 1 year 8 months. Before coming to Canada to study, a majority of these students had finished Form 5 or Grade 11 (53%) or higher grades (9%) and had taken the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (a public examination administered to Hong Kong students at the end of Grade 11). Just 14% had finished only up to Form 3 (Grade 9), while 18% had completed only Form 4 (Grade 10) before they came.

Most of the students had siblings. On average, those in the sample had an older brother (0.67), an older sister (0.99), a younger brother (0.97), and a younger sister (0.99). A majority of students' parents had

at least a secondary school education (father, 70%; mother, 64%). A plurality of respondents classified their parents' occupations as "managerial or professional" (father, 37%; mother, 12%). The educational background and occupation of the parents are given in Table 6.

**Table 6**  
**Educational and Occupational Background of**  
**Visa Students' Parents**

Parents' educational level	Father	Mother
a. elementary school	11%	16%
b. secondary school	38%	40%
c. post secondary	13%	11%
d. university	15%	9%
e. post graduate	4%	4%
f. no schooling at all	1%	1%
g. I don't know.	19%	19%

Parents' occupation	Father	Mother
a. managerial & professional	37%	12%
b. white collar	19%	8%
c. skilled worker	4%	2%
d. unskilled worker	11%	3%
e. retired/housewife	1%	47%

Because of the large number of Hong Kong immigrants living in Metropolitan Toronto, it is likely that many visa students have relatives and/or friends in the area. As expected, many visa students lived with relatives (48%) during their stay. Table 7 gives the mean number of relatives and friends of visa students living in Toronto and the percentages of type of living arrangements.

When asked about their extra-curricular activities, students in the sample seemed to have been more active in Hong Kong. Some students participated in activities such as skiing, but with few exceptions, Hong Kong visa students in Canada spent much of their time studying and doing household chores. Compared to Metropolitan Toronto, Hong Kong is a more compact city, and, consequently, students were more mobile there and found it more convenient to participate in after-school activities. The pattern of their activities after school, however, is more or less the same in both cities, given their responses in Table 8.

**Table 7**  
**Living Arrangements of Visa Students**

**Number of relatives/friends living in Metro Toronto:**

	Mean
a. parents	0.14
b. brothers and sisters	0.55
c. uncles and aunts	2.6
d. cousins	2.1
e. friends known in Hong Kong	4.0
f. former classmates	5.3

**With whom do you stay in Metro Toronto?**

	Percentage
a. Fellow students from Hong Kong	10%
b. Friends from Hong Kong who live here	14%
c. Relatives who live here	48%
d. Canadian fellow students	5%
e. Canadian family	8%
e. I live alone in an apartment/house.	15%
f. Other (e.g. school residence)	6%

**Table 8**  
**Most Popular After-School Activities in  
Hong Kong and Canada**

(On a 5-point scale: 1, never; 2, rarely; 3, sometimes; 4, often; 5, very often)

	Hong Kong	Canada
a. Going to movies	3.3	2.6
b. Watching television	3.9	3.1
c. Watching video tapes	3.4	3.2
d. Going to concerts	2.2	1.3
e. Going to karaoke	2.2	2.0
f. Participating in school choir	2.0	1.4
g. Playing ball games	3.2	2.1
h. Playing school sports	3.0	1.7
i. Taking part in extra-curricular activities	2.9	2.1
j. Reading newspapers/magazines	3.3	3.0
k. Playing majong/cards	2.7	2.4
l. Playing billiards/snookers	2.0	1.9

m. Playing video games	3.0	2.6
n. Roaming in shopping malls	3.2	3.2
o. Travelling abroad	2.4	1.9
p. Camping and hiking	2.5	1.4
q. Driving around	1.3	1.8
r. Dating	2.5	2.1
s. Religious activities	1.9	1.8

In general Hong Kong visa students did not have very serious problems living and studying in Metropolitan Toronto. The personal problems they experienced in Canada included difficulty mixing with Canadian students and expressing themselves in English and separation from friends and family in Hong Kong. Some students indicated they had financial problems and difficulties in adapting to the school curriculum and teaching methods in Canada. Mean values of their expressed difficulties are given below in Table 9.

**Table 9**  
**Personal Problems Experienced in Canada**

(On a 5-point scale: 1, not difficult; 2, somewhat; 3, not sure; 4, difficult; 5, very difficult)

	Mean
a. Finding accommodation	1.87
b. Getting food and cooking	1.75
c. Getting used to the climate	1.87
d. Separation from family	2.40
e. Separation from friends from Hong Kong	2.41
f. Making new friends in Canada	1.79
g. Mixing with Canadian students	2.82
h. Expressing myself in English	2.61
i. Adaptation to the teaching approach	2.10
j. Adaptation to the school curriculum	2.18
k. Problems with immigration officials	2.17
l. Financial difficulties	2.32
m. Racial prejudice	2.22
n. Sex problems	2.08
o. Health problems	1.79

One of the main difficulties of Hong Kong students is their standard of English. The respondents were asked to rate their ability to use English for a variety of tasks. This was measured on a 5-point scale from 1, very unsatisfactory to 5, very satisfactory. The mean score, as reported below in Table 10, is barely above the middle value of 3 for all tasks. Their lack of confidence in English inhibits their mixing with Canadian students and hinders progress in their studies.

**Table 10**  
**Self Rating of Ability to Use English**  
 (On a 5-point scale: 1, very unsatisfactory; 5, very satisfactory)

	Mean
a. Writing papers	3.1
b. Reading newspapers	3.0
c. Reading textbooks	3.5
d. Speaking in class	3.2
e. Understanding class lessons	3.7
f. Taking part in class discussions	3.1
g. Talking to Canadian friends	3.1
h. Watching television programmes	3.3
i. Listening to the radio	3.0

When asked whom they consulted when they had difficulties, a large number of students in the sample either turned to their friends and peers (45%) or kept their problems to themselves (29%). Although 48% of visa students lived with their relatives, only 25% consulted them about problems. For academic questions, students consulted school guidance counsellors (18%) or teachers (20%). Only 1% sought help from voluntary agencies and only 3% from government agencies. Apparently, most students were not aware of the existence of these agencies or felt too shy to approach them for assistance.

Even though Hong Kong visa students are thousands of miles from home, many of them were able to keep in close contact with their families in Hong Kong because of modern communications technology. Nearly half of the students in the sample wrote or telephoned their families at least once every 1-2 weeks. Some students reported that they had monthly telephone bills worth hundreds of dollars. For this group, frequent family contact provided the necessary assurance and support

they needed. However, about 5% of visa students had no contact with their families at all. It is this group of students who are more in need of outside assistance and support in times of trouble. Table 11 gives percentages of the frequency of contacts with family members.

**Table 11**  
**How often do you write or telephone your family members  
in Hong Kong?**

	From you to your family	From your family to you
a. At least once every 1-2 weeks	46%	48%
b. Every 2-4 weeks	25%	23%
c. Every 4-8 weeks	13%	11%
d. Every 8-12 weeks	6%	5%
e. Over 12 weeks (3 months)	7%	7%
f. Never	4%	5%

As for preparation before coming to Canada, 58% of the students reported that they had discussions with family members and relatives or with classmates (24%), while others had gathered information on studying in Canada from a variety of different sources. See Table 12. About 20% indicated they did not have any preparation.

**Table 12**  
**Preparation Before Coming to Canada to Study**

	Percentage
a. Reading on Canada	13%
b. Attending orientation program in Hong Kong	9%
c. Visits to Overseas Students & Scholarship Section in the Hong Kong Education Department	18%
d. Discussion with guidance teachers	15%
e. Discussion with classmates	24%
f. Discussion with family members and relatives	58%
g. Others (e.g. visit to Canada before)	6%
h. I did not have any preparation.	20%

When asked about the kind of support they wished to obtain from their schools, school boards, or other agencies to make their sojourn in

Canada more agreeable and fruitful, the students made the following suggestions:

- 1) Schools should increase English as a Second Language (ESL) facilities, provide more information on universities, and reduce school fees.
- 2) School boards should provide transportation and upgrading courses at no cost.
- 3) Government agencies should provide more financial support, furnish more information of students' chances of immigration to Canada, and delete the Goods and Services Tax (GST) from tuition costs.

An overwhelming majority (89%) of the Hong Kong visa students in the present study planned on going to university, and 79% wished to do so in Canada. For their preferred course of study at universities, the students chose business (46%) and computer science or engineering (23%). Hence, it is no surprise that these secondary students wanted more information about Canadian universities. Since English language competence is a major hurdle in their admission to university, they also wanted the secondary schools to provide more ESL facilities. As their families had to pay annual school fees of \$8,000 to \$10,000 to school boards, many of the Hong Kong visa students and their families were under considerable financial pressure. The students felt some of this financial burden could be lessened if the school boards reduced their tuition and waived fees for upgrading courses. It should be noted that not all visa students come from wealthy families, and school tuition in Canada is not insignificant to a large number of middle class families who send their children abroad.

Many of the families of Hong Kong visa students have plans to immigrate to Canada in the near future. When asked about immigration, 28% replied in the positive, and another 42% said they were not sure. For those who answered positively, 9% indicated they planned to emigrate in 1992 and 4% in 1993. As a result of their experience in Canada, 37% of the students expressed that if they had a choice, they would remain in Canada after completing their studies. Hence, it is not surprising that these visa students wished to increase their opportunities to go to Canadian universities, to seek some financial relief, and to explore chances of immigration to Canada.

It is consoling that in spite of some initial difficulties, the majority of Hong Kong visa students found their learning experience in Canadian secondary schools beneficial and rewarding. They listed the benefits of their stay in Canada as follows: improved English, feeling of self-



confidence, living independently, more freedom, less pressure, and above all, more choice in their studies and more opportunity to attend university.

### **Interviews with School Teachers, Principals, and Related Personnel**

A total of twenty-eight school teachers, principals, and related personnel (including one nurse and two social workers) were interviewed in this study. The purpose was to solicit information concerning the support to and the difficulties encountered by or with visa students and to get suggestions for improvement to services. To facilitate the collection of information, a structured interview schedule (see appendix 2) was prepared and sent to schools in advance of interviews to be held on school premises. Some teachers completed and returned the schedules but were unable to attend the following meeting with the researcher. Those who did come to the meeting were either interviewed individually or in groups. During the one-hour interview, participants elaborated on their difficulties in dealing with visa students and made constructive suggestions for improvement. Meetings with school board officials usually took place at their board's offices.

It is important to note that public schools receiving a considerable number of Hong Kong visa students also have large enrolments of Hong Kong immigrants. As most school teachers interviewed did not make a distinction between visa students and immigrants, their observations often covered both groups together. However, in the private schools, most if not all Hong Kong students enrolled were visa students.

### ***Responses from Public School Teachers and Related Personnel***

Teachers generally found that the English standard of most Hong Kong visa students was low when compared to Canadian students. Schools had responded by offering many ESL courses to raise the levels of English of the visa students. Special ESL classes for humanities subjects, such as history or geography, were also designed. As the majority of Hong Kong visa students were in Grade 12 and 13, more senior or Ontario Academic Credit (OAC) courses were offered, in particular, in mathematics and science. This exerted tremendous pressure on schools in their allocation of teacher resources and in setting up timetables. Schools are provided by their boards with fixed numbers of teachers according to student enrolment; hence, heavy burdens and responsibil-



ities were placed on the teachers, particularly those in the guidance and ESL departments.

School teachers observed that generally visa students worked hard in their studies and provided good motivation to Canadian students. However, they also observed that Hong Kong students tended to form their own peer groups and did not mix well with other students. Outside of the classroom, they preferred to speak Cantonese, a southern Chinese dialect commonly spoken in Guangdong province and Hong Kong. Teachers observed that younger students found it easier to integrate and make friends with Canadian students. On the positive side, teachers also felt that having visa students of different nationalities, including Hong Kong, brought a multicultural outlook and influence to their schools.

Hong Kong visa students generally tried to "fast track," or finish high school as quickly as possible, so that they could move on to university. However, their expectations were often too high, and they fell short of their goals. Teachers and guidance counsellors had difficulty in persuading these students to be more realistic in their course selections. Because of their limited ability in English, most visa students did not participate actively in class discussion. Furthermore, they were not used to the more student-centred approach to learning and teaching, expressing feelings and opinions freely and openly, and the emphasis on problem solving rather than rote learning and on group work rather than written tests and examinations. These differences in education hindered their academic progress, particularly in humanities subjects.

As some visa students lived by themselves or with friends, they had to learn how to manage their own lives, to do their own shopping and cooking, and to schedule their study time properly. Teachers found some students were not yet able to look after themselves. They were undernourished and often did not get enough sleep.

Another concern expressed by teachers, and particularly by guidance counsellors, was that they often were not able to contact or communicate with the visa students' 'guardians,' people living in Canada who were responsible for the student. Some of the 'guardians' were distant relatives of the family and had no real control over the students. They had the responsibility but not the authority. It is not uncommon for visa students to live with relatives in their first year in Canada but to move out the following year to live alone or with their friends. For serious matters, school personnel sometimes had to call Hong Kong in order to talk directly to the student's parents. In effect, school staff have had to play a parental role for these students.

Another problem which visa students might face is extortion. There were reports that gangs of youths, sometimes their fellow students, demanded money from them. These visa students, unfamiliar with the local situation, were too frightened to turn to the police or school authorities for assistance. Other students were not able to handle their new freedom without parental supervision, which had led to some 'unreported' teenage pregnancies.

To prevent or solve the problems faced by visa students, school teachers suggested students should be better prepared before coming to Canada. In particular, students should upgrade their English language level and be more aware of the Canadian approach to learning and teaching. Teachers advised that parents should be more sympathetic and keep in close contact with their children to provide them with the necessary moral support they needed. Parents should be more realistic in their expectations of their children's achievement and trust the judgment of teachers and guidance counsellors on the levels and courses needed by their children. While most teachers were aware of the resource support services provided by schools and boards to visa students, they felt more should be done for the visa students, as well as the large number of immigrant students enrolled in their schools.

Though there are many voluntary agencies in Metropolitan Toronto, very few provide services to this large group of visa students. One teacher suggested that many of the church groups which have now moved from Hong Kong to Toronto might provide some moral and social support to these lonely students, thousands of miles away from home.

Finally, many teachers expressed the desire to have a deeper understanding of the culture of Hong Kong, a world-renowned city, and its people. They would appreciate having books, periodicals, and videotapes about Hong Kong. They were particularly interested in the Hong Kong education system and how it works. Some schools arranged professional development days especially devoted to understanding students from Hong Kong and discussing their problems. Teachers welcomed such arrangements, as this greatly assisted them in their ability to deal with Hong Kong visa and immigrant students.

### ***Responses from Private School Teachers and Administrators***

Visa students in private schools tended to be more mobile. They switched courses and schools more often than those in public schools. This made administration and planning very difficult for private

school administrators. One area of concern was the re-issuing of student visas by Immigration Canada, since some students drop out of school after they have only studied for a short period. While school personnel appreciated the heavy workload of immigration authorities, they would prefer to have a closer liaison and cooperation with immigration officials.

In recent years, some private schools have closed suddenly because of management or financial difficulties. Visa students enrolled in these schools suffered undue hardship. While the Ontario Ministry of Education helped to reallocate the students to other schools, these visa students had great difficulty or no way at all to obtain a reimbursement for their paid fees. As a result, private schools received bad publicity overseas and had great difficulty in recruiting of new students.

### ***Provision of Support to Visa Students***

The provision of support by school boards and individual schools in Metropolitan Toronto varies according to the number of enrolled visa students and board regulations. Boards receiving large numbers of Hong Kong visa students provided central support by appointing several Chinese-speaking social workers or liaison officers. However, these Chinese-speaking officers often had other responsibilities, so they could only allocate a fraction of their time to deal with the needs of Hong Kong visa students. Some boards hired one liaison counsellor per high school where needed. The counsellor also had considerable responsibility for the needs of other students, in particular the immigrant students. For those boards with only a few visa students, no special support was available at the central level.

As a majority of their students are visa students, the private schools provided many more services. These included briefings before departure from Hong Kong, reception at Canadian airports, and assistance for students in finding accommodation and applying for health cards and renewal of visas. Often there were Chinese-speaking teachers or staff members to help Hong Kong visa students. The quality of services, however, varied from school to school.

Some boards and schools arranged orientation programmes for visa students before or at the beginning of the school term. This information greatly helped the students in adjusting to a new place and making new friends. Visa students found particularly useful the welcome packages prepared by boards, containing such essential information as a TTC map and telephone numbers of important contacts.

## **Proposed Improvements in Solving Problems**

It appears that one of the greatest problems faced by Hong Kong visa students is their competence in English language. To maximize their academic experience, students who wish to study overseas are strongly advised to upgrade their English level before leaving Hong Kong. With increasing numbers of visa and immigrant students, schools and boards here in Canada should consider increasing the number of ESL courses offered.

Both students and parents should gather sufficient information about the Canadian school system and life before the children embark for overseas study. Students and parents should also strive for realistic goals and expectations. Parents should keep in constant contact and provide sympathetic support to their children. Boards and schools should prepare information sheets and pamphlets, preferably in Chinese, with photos and pictures describing life and study in Canada. To establish links and cooperation, the exchange of information and visits should be encouraged between the Ontario Ministry of Education, Boards of Education, and the Hong Kong Education Department.

Orientation programmes involving both Canadian and foreign students should be arranged by boards and individual schools for new visa and immigrant students before school starts. Services provided by the board and the school and the personnel involved should be introduced. Students need to be encouraged to approach authorities for advice and assistance when the necessity arises, especially when they experience serious situations, such as extreme depression or criminal extortion.

Student programs, such as peer counselling or a buddy system, should be encouraged and arranged by individual schools. This will not only alleviate some of the burdens on guidance counsellors, but it will also enhance mixing with local students. Furthermore, students at this age are more inclined to turn to their peers with a problem than to the authorities.

Close links should be established between the parents of visa students and the Boards of Education or the schools their children are attending. If parents entrust their children to local guardians, those guardians should be given not only the responsibility for that child but also the authority to act if the need arises. Regular seminars should be arranged by the board and the schools for the guardians in order to discuss problems of mutual concern, and reports should be sent to parents and guardians on a regular basis.



Another concern expressed by Hong Kong visa students is the heavy financial burden placed on them and their families. While it is their families' responsibility to provide adequate financial support, local community groups might be approached to set up some kind of scholarship or emergency fund. Scholarships would provide encouragement to hard working students, while an emergency fund would help those in urgent financial need.

As the number of Hong Kong visa and immigrant students increases, boards and schools should consider hiring more teaching and support staff who can speak the mother tongues of these students. This would facilitate communication not only with students but also with their parents who may not be able to speak English. A better understanding of the culture and background of the visa students and their families would greatly help in providing better guidance and counselling.

More professional development and continuing education courses are required for teachers to become more aware of the problems experienced by visa students and to develop strategies to integrate these students into the local school system. Guest speakers, including former students and members of voluntary agencies and community associations, could be invited to participate in such activities. The Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Toronto might also be approached for current information about Hong Kong and its education system.

Finally, more detailed information about the Ontario education system, in particular the operation of private schools, should be provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education to parents and prospective students in Hong Kong. Hong Kong students are advised to consult the Hong Kong Education Department to collect information on private schools in Canada before committing themselves. They should be aware that some private schools charge much higher fees than public schools.

## Conclusion

The sojourn of a visa student at the secondary level is a precious learning experience, yet quite an expensive endeavour for their families. Their experiences during their stay in Canada will greatly affect their perceptions and dealings with Canada, whether they continue on to university, later immigrate, or return to Hong Kong. Hence, it is the joint responsibility of schools, boards, and governments to make their sojourn meaningful and fruitful. Much has been accomplished; yet, much more still needs to be done.

## References

- Chan, E. Y. 1987, "Chinese Students from Hong Kong at the University of Calgary: Their Problems and Socio-Cultural Orientation." Master's thesis, University of Calgary.
- Chow, H. P. H. 1990, "An Exodus Experience: Difficulties Encountered by International High School Students." Master's thesis, University of Toronto.
- Lary, Diana. 1990, "Immigration Statistics," *Canada and Hong Kong Update*, No. 1 (Spring), p. 2, 5.
- . 1991, "Regional Variations in Hong Kong Immigration," *Canada and Hong Kong Update*, No. 5 (Fall), p. 6.
- Mickle, Kathryn M. 1984, "The Cross-Cultural Adaptation of Hong Kong Students at Two Ontario Universities." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto.
- Mickle, Kathryn M., and Chan, Rosanna. 1986, *The Cross Cultural Adaptation of Hong Kong Chinese Students at Canadian Universities*. Ottawa: Canadian Bureau for International Education.
- Turner, Samantha; Macfarlane, Jim; and Crawford, Patricia. 1984, *A Study of the Services Provided to Visa Students in North York Secondary Schools*. North York Board of Education.

## Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the North York Board of Education, the Scarborough Board of Education, and the Toronto Board of Education for their kind permission to conduct this study in selected schools of their Boards. The author also wishes to thank the administrators of two independent private schools in the Metropolitan Toronto area for their support in this study. Above all, the author expresses his appreciation to the students, teachers, school administrators and related personnel, and board officials involved in this study. Without their enthusiastic and active participation, this study might never have been successfully completed. The author wishes to record his appreciation towards the Ontario Ministry of Education for the education statistics provided and the Canada and Hong Kong Project for the financial support given for this study.

Specifically, the author is grateful to Professor Diana Lary, Professor Paul Evans, Dr. Kathryn Mickle, Professor Bernard Luk, and Dr. Janet Rubinoff of the Joint Centre for Asia Pacific Studies for their support

and helpful discussion during the implementation of the project and the drafting of this article. In addition, he thanks Dr. Mickle, Prof. Luk, and Dr. Rubinoff for their help in organizing the workshop, Hong Kong Visa Students in Canada, sponsored by the Canada and Hong Kong Project and held on 3 October 1992, as part of Festival Hong Kong '92 in Toronto. Finally, the author thanks Janet Rubinoff, coordinator of the Canada and Hong Kong Project, and Louise Gunn for their assistance in editing and preparing this manuscript for publication and the reviewer for her helpful comments.





# A STUDY OF HONG KONG VISA STUDENTS IN METRO TORONTO

## QUESTIONNAIRE for Secondary School Students

1. Year of birth: 19 \_\_ \_\_ Month \_\_ \_\_
2. Sex: \_\_ (M/F)
3. Grade level: \_\_ \_\_
4. How long have you been in Canada? \_\_ \_\_ years \_\_ \_\_ months
5. How many brothers and sisters have you got? (Please indicate numbers.)
 

a. older brothers	__ __
b. older sisters	__ __
c. younger brothers	__ __
d. younger sisters	__ __
6. Do you have any relatives or friends living in Metro Toronto? (Please indicate numbers.)
 

a. parents	__ __
b. brothers and sisters	__ __
c. uncles and aunts	__ __
d. cousins	__ __
e. friends known in Hong Kong	__ __
f. former classmates	__ __
7. With whom do you stay in Metro Toronto? (Please circle your answer.)
 

a. fellow students from Hong Kong
b. friends from Hong Kong who live here
c. relatives who live here
d. Canadian fellow students
e. Canadian family
f. I live alone in an apartment/house.
g. others _____ (Please specify)

8. What associations do you belong to in Canada? (Please circle your answer and supply names of associations where appropriate.)

- a. Chinese student group \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Chinese religious group \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Chinese social group \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Canadian student group \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Canadian religious group \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Canadian social group \_\_\_\_\_
- g. others \_\_\_\_\_
- h. I do not belong to any association.

9. How often do you write to or telephone your family members in Hong Kong, and how often do they write to or telephone you? (Please circle your answers.)

	From you to your family	From your family to you
a. at least once every 1 - 2 weeks	1	1
b. every 2 - 4 weeks	2	2
c. every 4 - 8 weeks	3	3
d. every 8 - 12 weeks	4	4
e. over 12 weeks (3 months)	5	5
f. never	6	6

10. What are your parents' education levels? (Please circle your answers.)

	Father	Mother
a. elementary school	1	1
b. secondary school	2	2
c. post secondary	3	3
d. university	4	4
e. post graduate	5	5
f. no schooling at all	6	6
g. I don't know.	7	7

11. What are your parents' occupation?

Father: \_\_\_\_\_

Mother: \_\_\_\_\_

12. What grade level did you finish school in Hong Kong before you left for overseas study? (Please circle your answer or specify where appropriate.)

- a. grade 9 (form 3)
- b. grade 10 (form 4)
- c. grade 11 (form 5)
- d. grade 12 (form 6)
- e. grade 13 (form 7)

f. other \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)

13. Did you take any public examinations conducted by the Hong Kong Examinations Authority?

Yes/no \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what were your examination results? (Please circle your answers and give the numbers of subject grades achieved in each examination.)

	Number of subjects with grades				
	A	B	C	D	E
a. Hong Kong Certificate of Education	—	—	—	—	—
b. Hong Kong Higher Level Examination	—	—	—	—	—
c. Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination	—	—	—	—	—

14. How did you prepare yourself before coming to Canada to study? (You may wish to circle more than one answer and specify where appropriate.)

- a. reading on Canada
- b. attending orientation program in Hong Kong
- c. visits to the Overseas Students & Scholarship Section  
in the Hong Kong Education Department
- d. discussion with guidance teachers
- e. discussion with classmates
- f. discussion with family members and relatives

g. others \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)

h. I did not have any preparation.

15. Which of the following activities did you take part out of school in HONG KONG? (Please circle your answers.)

	Very often	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never
a. going to movies	1	2	3	4	5
b. watching television	1	2	3	4	5
c. watching video tapes	1	2	3	4	5
d. going to concerts	1	2	3	4	5
e. going to Karaoke	1	2	3	4	5
f. participating in school choir	1	2	3	4	5
g. playing ball games	1	2	3	4	5
h. playing school sports	1	2	3	4	5
i. taking part in extracurricular activities	1	2	3	4	5
j. reading newspapers/magazines	1	2	3	4	5
k. playing majong/cards	1	2	3	4	5
l. playing billiards/snookers	1	2	3	4	5
m. playing video games	1	2	3	4	5
n. roaming in shopping malls	1	2	3	4	5
o. travelling abroad	1	2	3	4	5
p. camping and hiking	1	2	3	4	5
q. driving around	1	2	3	4	5
r. dating	1	2	3	4	5
s. religious activities	1	2	3	4	5
t. others _____	(Please specify)				

16. Which of the following activities do you take part out of school in CANADA? (Please circle your answers.)

	Very often	Often	Some-times	Rarely	Never
a. going to movies	1	2	3	4	5
b. watching television	1	2	3	4	5
c. watching video tapes	1	2	3	4	5
d. going to concerts	1	2	3	4	5
e. going to Karaoke	1	2	3	4	5
f. participating in school choir	1	2	3	4	5
g. playing ball games	1	2	3	4	5
h. playing school sports	1	2	3	4	5
i. taking part in extracurricular activities	1	2	3	4	5
j. reading newspapers/magazines	1	2	3	4	5
k. playing majong/cards	1	2	3	4	5
l. playing billiards/snookers	1	2	3	4	5
m. playing video games	1	2	3	4	5
n. roaming in shopping malls	1	2	3	4	5
o. travelling abroad	1	2	3	4	5
p. camping and hiking	1	2	3	4	5
q. driving around	1	2	3	4	5
r. dating	1	2	3	4	5
s. religious activities	1	2	3	4	5
t. others _____	(Please specify)				

17. Please indicate the extent of difficulties in solving the following problems you have personally come across in Canada? (Please circle your answers.)

	Very difficult	Diffi- cult	Some- what	Not difficult	Not sure
a. finding accommodation	1	2	3	4	5
b. getting food and cooking	1	2	3	4	5
c. getting used to the climate	1	2	3	4	5
e. separation from family	1	2	3	4	5
f. separation from friends in Hong Kong	1	2	3	4	5
g. making new friends in Canada	1	2	3	4	5
h. mixing with Canadian students	1	2	3	4	5
i. adaptation to the teaching approach	1	2	3	4	5
j. adaptation to the school curriculum	1	2	3	4	5
k. expressing myself in English	1	2	3	4	5
l. problems with immigration officials	1	2	3	4	5
m. financial difficulties	1	2	3	4	5
n. racial prejudice	1	2	3	4	5
o. sex problems	1	2	3	4	5
p. health problems	1	2	3	4	5
q. others _____ (Please specify)	1	2	3	4	5

18. For the above difficulties, whom do you turn to in solving the problems?  
(Please specify difficulties in spaces provided.)

Difficulties

- a. guidance counsellors \_\_\_\_\_
- b. school teachers \_\_\_\_\_
- c. friends and peers \_\_\_\_\_
- d. guardians and relatives in Canada \_\_\_\_\_
- e. voluntary agencies (e.g. Salvation Army) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)
- f. government agencies (e.g. Public Health Department) \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)
- g. others \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)
- h. I keep the problems to myself.

Who is the most helpful in solving your problems? \_\_\_\_\_

19. What kind of support do you wish to obtain from your school, the school board or other agencies to make your stay in Canada comfortable and fruitful?
- a. School: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. School board: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Voluntary agency: \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. Government agency: \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. others \_\_\_\_\_  
(please specify)
20. As a result of your experience in Canada, and if you have a choice, where would you wish to live? (Please circle your answer and specify where appropriate.)
- a. stay in Canada after my study
  - b. return to Hong Kong
  - c. go to another country \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)
  - d. no preference
21. Has your family got any plan to emigrate to Canada in the near future? (Please circle your answer and specify where appropriate.)
- a. Yes; if yes, when? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
  - c. Not sure
22. What do you plan to do after secondary school study? (Please circle your answer.)
- a. go to a university
  - b. go to a community college
  - c. take up a job
  - d. I don't know yet.
23. If you wish to further your studies after high school, where do you wish to study? (Please circle your answer and specify where appropriate.)
- a. Canada
  - b. Hong Kong
  - c. others \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)
  - d. I have not yet decided.



24. In which subject area do you wish to specialise in your further study?  
(Please circle your answer and specify where appropriate.)

a. arts and humanities  
b. social science  
c. business  
d. pure science  
e. computer or engineering  
f. pharmacy  
g. medicine or dentistry  
h. others \_\_\_\_\_ (Please specify)  
i. I have no idea yet.

25. How would you rate your ability to use English? (Please circle the appropriate number as it would apply to your self-rated ability in English.)

	Very satisfactory		Not sure		Very unsatisfactory
a. writing papers	1	2	3	4	5
b. reading newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
c. reading textbooks	1	2	3	4	5
d. speaking in class	1	2	3	4	5
e. understanding class lessons	1	2	3	4	5
f. taking part in class discussions	1	2	3	4	5
g. talking to Canadian friends	1	2	3	4	5
h. watching television programmes	1	2	3	4	5
i. listening to radio	1	2	3	4	5

26. What are the benefits which you think that you have gained from studying in a Canadian school such as your present school?

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION IN COMPLETING  
THE QUESTIONNAIRE

## A STUDY OF HONG KONG VISA STUDENTS IN METRO TORONTO

## Interview for school personnel

Date of interview : \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school : \_\_\_\_\_

Person interviewed : \_\_\_\_\_

Position : \_\_\_\_\_

(The above information is for reference only and will NOT be included in the report on the findings.)

1. Number of visa students currently (1991/92 school year) in school :

Grade level	from Hong Kong	from other countries
grade 9	— — —	— — —
grade 10	— — —	— — —
grade 11	— — —	— — —
grade 12	— — —	— — —
OAC	— — —	— — —
Total	— — —	— — —

2. What are the impacts of visa students, especially those from Hong Kong, on the following aspects in the school?

a. course offerings : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. social atmosphere : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

c. staffing : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

d. student services (guidance) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

e. ESL programs : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

f. others : \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. As far as you are aware, what kind of support services are being provided to visa students by the school board, voluntary agencies and government departments?
- a. school board : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. voluntary agencies : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. government departments : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. From your personal experience, what are the major difficulties faced by visa students, especially those coming from Hong Kong?
- a. academic: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. language ability : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. social : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. health : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. psychological : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. financial : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- g. others : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. What suggestions would you propose for improvements in solving the problems faced by visa students (especially those from Hong Kong), school teachers and personnel?
- a. students before coming to Canada : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. parents/guardians : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. school : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. school board : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. voluntary agency/government department : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- g. others : \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. What type of support would you suggest that would enhance your ability to deal with visa students?
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Any other comments on matters related to Hong Kong visa students :
- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



